

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
MORaine ROUTE SHUTTLE BUS STOPS  
AND  
SPRAGUE LAKE ROAD IMPROVEMENTS  
FOR  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK**

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering the construction of visitor facilities at eight existing shuttle bus stops on the Moraine shuttle bus route in Rocky Mountain National Park. A replacement bridge and improvements on the Sprague Lake road are also being considered.

Proposed construction at the shuttle bus stops includes the installation of a solid pad to support the weight of the shuttle buses. Seven shuttle bus stops will have concrete pads (total surface area of concrete for all seven shuttle bus stops would be approximately 6,970 square feet). One shuttle bus stop will have an asphalt pad (total surface area of asphalt would be approximately 1,000 square feet). A total of 3,920 square feet of exposed aggregate/colored concrete with benches and information signs will be constructed at all eight shuttle bus stops. Bus shelters will be constructed at two of the shuttle bus stops. The shelters will measure 26 feet long by 12 feet wide by 12 feet tall.

A new 50 foot long by 27 foot wide bridge, and approximately 673 linear feet of road widening including 19,782 square feet (0.45 acres) of slope cut along the Sprague Lake road is also proposed.

Much of the shuttle bus stop improvement area and some of the Sprague Lake road improvement will occur within previously disturbed areas. Approximately 3,920 square feet of the 9,583 square feet that will be disturbed during the construction of the shuttle bus stops will constitute new disturbance. Approximately 19,782 square feet (0.45 acres) of the 28,793 square feet (0.66 acres) of the Sprague Lake road improvement project will constitute new disturbance.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) that evaluated the impacts of these proposed projects was released for public review and comment on July 2, 2003. A preferred alternative was identified in the EA. Concerns identified during scoping and evaluated in the EA focused on impacts to topography, geology and soils; vegetation; water resources; wetlands; park operations; and visitor use, understanding, and appreciation.

**PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

**ALTERNATIVE 2 – IMPROVE MORaine ROUTE SHUTTLE BUS STOPS AND IMPROVE THE SPRAGUE LAKE ROAD.**

The preferred alternative will improve eight shuttle bus stops and improve the Sprague Lake Road and bridge. Two of the shuttle bus stops would be moved a short distance (less than 165 feet) to improve visitor safety and to protect park resources. Six existing shuttle bus stops would be improved at their current location. The bridge on the Sprague Lake Road crossing Glacier Creek would be replaced. The Sprague Lake road south of the bridge to Sprague Lake would be widened to more safely accommodate two-way traffic. Approximately 644 linear feet of the road and

approximately 5,492 square feet (0.13 acre) of the parking lot serving Glacier Creek stables and Sprague Lake will be resurfaced for maintenance purposes

The Preferred Alternative provides park managers with the best means to improve visitor safety and park operations for the Moraine Route shuttle buses, and provides the greatest long-term protection to natural resources and native biodiversity.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

Alternatives considered included:

- No Action: no management actions would be initiated. Existing shuttle bus stops would continue to be used. The Sprague Lake road and bridge would continue to be used in their current condition.
- Improve Moraine Route shuttle bus stops and improve the Sprague Lake Road (the preferred alternative)

The environmentally preferred alternative should be the one with the least impact to the “human environment.” Section 1508.7 of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) state that cumulative impacts are to be evaluated regardless of what other agencies (Federal or non-Federal) or persons might be involved. The National Park Service is required to consider the “absolute” impact the resource is experiencing.

In this case, the environmentally preferred alternative is the same as the preferred alternative (Alternative 2). Alternative 2 seeks a balance between minimizing environmental impacts, improving park operations, and addressing health and safety concerns. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which is guided by Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. CEQ regulations provide direction that “[t]he environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101. Generally, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. It also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.” [Question 6a, “Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ’s National Environmental Policy Act Regulations” (40 CFR 1500-1508), *Federal Register* Vol. 46, No. 55, 18026-18038, March 23, 1981]. Improving the Moraine Route shuttle bus stops and the Sprague Lake Road, even though having short-term localized negligible to minor adverse impacts to natural resources, would provide a long-term minor benefit to natural resources, park operations, visitor use and experience, and enjoyment of Rocky Mountain National Park.

After consideration of public comments, careful review of potential resource and visitor impacts, and development of appropriate mitigation measures to protect resources, park visitors and park employees, the preferred alternative has been selected for implementation. The preferred alternative allows the widest range of use and enjoyment of Rocky Mountain National Park without degradation of the environment or significant risk of health or safety.

## **WHY THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

### *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse*

The preferred alternative will have no long-term adverse impact on geology and topography; threatened, endangered, candidate species or species of special concern; natural lightscapes or soundscapes; archeological resources, cultural landscapes, historic structures, and museum collections; prime and unique farmlands; ethnographic resources; socioeconomics of the park and nearby communities; or environmental justice. There would be short-term localized negligible to minor adverse impacts to topography, geology and soils; native vegetation; water resources; and wetlands with a long-term minor benefit to park operations and visitor use and experience. There would be long-term beneficial effects to soils and native vegetation; threatened, endangered, candidate species or rare species; aquatic, wetland and riparian communities located adjacent to the proposed improvements. Mitigating measures proposed for the preferred alternative will increase the safety margin for employees and park visitors during construction. Visitors will have opportunities to view the park's scenery, hike and camp, but will be excluded from small-localized areas during construction. The no action alternative afforded less long-term protection of the Park's natural resources than the preferred alternative and had a higher risk to park operations and visitor safety. The impacts are described in the EA.

### *Degree of effect on public health or safety*

Improving public health and safety was the primary reason for the proposal to improve the shuttle stops, bridge and road. There will be a net benefit to public health and safety once construction is completed. With the implementation of mitigation measures, which include employee safety measures, there would be no cumulative impact to human health and safety for park visitors or park employees.

### *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas*

As described in the EA, no effects to historic or cultural resources were identified for the preferred alternative. There are no prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas affected. Only 400 square feet (0.009 acre) of wetland would be impacted from the replacement of the bridge. Consultation with the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) was completed, and a Section 404 permit issued. The permit specified that the park will mitigate the 400 square feet of wetland that will be lost during the bridge reconstruction by restoring wetlands at the former site of the Glacier Creek Livery. Restoration will occur at a 1:1.5 ratio, meaning that for every square foot of wetland disturbed by the proposed project, 1.5 square feet would be restored.

### *Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial*

During scoping and internal and external review of the environmental assessment, no controversial issues were identified. With the implementation of the mitigation measures, the potential impact on the human environment is expected to be negligible.

*Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks*

As described in the EA, risks involved relate to public and park employee safety. The preferred alternative will improve the quality of the human environment. The mitigating measures will reduce uncertain, unique and unknown risks to negligible levels. Therefore, there were no highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks identified.

*Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration*

Using shuttle buses along Bear Lake Road began in the 1970's. The bridge on the road to Sprague Lake was constructed in 1980. The road to Sprague Lake has existed since 1917. The preferred alternative will have a long-term minor benefit to park operations, public health and safety. There would be negligible long-term impacts to natural resources. Therefore, the action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

*Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts*

As described in the environmental assessment, impacts associated with the preferred alternative were evaluated for park natural and cultural resources, park employees and park visitors. Previous impacts to park resources in the area are due to earlier anthropic disturbances such as water diversions, settlements, lodges, camps and cabins, hunting and park development activities. The anthropic disturbances varied considerably as to type, intensity, and duration before and after the park was established. Most of the earlier anthropic disturbances have been removed and habitat restored to natural conditions. The Bear Lake Road reconstruction project (which is currently underway), the road and bridge to Sprague Lake, and the shuttle bus system have resulted in minor to moderate cumulative impacts along the Bear Lake Road with no impacts away from the road. Hiking trails accessed from the roads have resulted in minor cumulative impacts to natural resources adjacent to the trails with no impacts away from the trails. The combined impact of past and present actions and the implementation of the preferred alternative would result in minor cumulative impacts to park resources in the area of the Moraine Shuttle Bus Route and Sprague Lake Bridge, with a minor long-term benefit to park visitors.

*Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The project will have no impact on a county, state or federal highway. The preferred alternative with the implementation of mitigating measures would have a minor beneficial impact on two park roads. Compliance with §106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was completed by the park archeologist with concurrence by the SHPO, who determined there would be no adverse affect on objects on the National Register. There will be no loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

*Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Ecological Services, Colorado Field Office, was consulted on October 31, 2002. Based on their recommendations of species that might occur in the area, the project area was surveyed for endangered and threatened species and their critical habitat.

No endangered, threatened, rare species or critical habitat was observed in or around the proposed project areas. Therefore, threatened, endangered and rare species was dismissed as an impact topic.

*Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local environmental protection law*  
This action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

### *Impairment*

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, the National Park Service has determined that implementation of the proposal will not constitute an impairment to Rocky Mountain National Park's resources and values. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the *Environmental Assessment of the Moraine Route Shuttle Bus Stops and Sprague Lake Road Improvements*, the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgement of the decision-maker guided by the direction in *NPS Management Policies 2001*. Although the plan/project has some negative impacts, in all cases these adverse impacts are the result of actions taken to preserve and restore other park resources and values and to protect park visitors and park employees. Overall, the implementation of the preferred alternative will result in minor benefits to park resources and values, opportunities for their enjoyment, and it does not result in their impairment.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The environmental assessment was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending August 8, 2003. Two responses were received. The letters clearly stated a preference or strongly supported the preferred alternative. The letters were from individuals. There were no responses from agencies or organizations. One letter came from Oklahoma and the other from Colorado. Substantive comments to the EA centered on 2 topics: environmental impacts to Glacier Creek and Boulder Brook and access to the Fern Lake Trailhead. The comments resulted in minor changes to the text of the EA. Substantive comments are addressed in the Response to Public Comments which is Attachment "A" to this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The FONSI and Response to Public Comments will be sent to both individuals who commented on the EA.

## **CONCLUSION**

The preferred alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur are minor and temporary in effect. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended: Vaughn Baker 10-1-03  
Superintendent Date

Approved: Steve Martin 10/8/03  
Intermountain Regional Director Date

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**Response to Public Comments**  
**on the Moraine Route Shuttle Bus Stops**  
**and**  
**Sprague Lake Road Improvements**  
**for**  
**Rocky Mountain National Park**

Substantive comments received during the public comment period centered on two topics: environmental impacts to Glacier Creek and Boulder Brook, and access to the Fern Lake Trailhead. Substantive topics, which are addressed below, resulted in minor changes to the text of the Environmental Assessment.

1. *The references to Fern Lake Trailhead are ambiguous. The shuttle turn around point is not located at the Fern Lake trailhead, but about .75 mile east of the trailhead. Is the intention to move the turnaround to the trailhead, or move the trailhead back to the turnaround...? It would be well to pave the route to wherever it ends, to decrease dust and erosion into the Big Thompson River.*

You are correct, the shuttle bus turn around point is not located at the Fern Lake trailhead, but approximately one-mile east. The shuttle bus turnaround and Fern Lake trailhead will remain at their current locations. There is no plan to have shuttle buses drive to the trailhead because of the narrow road and lack of space to turn around. Park visitors using the shuttle system will still be required to walk from the shuttle stop to the trailhead. The road from the Moraine Park Livery to the shuttle bus turnaround will remain unpaved.

2. *Given the increase in visitation and use at Sprague Lake over the past few years, would it not make sense to include it in on the shuttle route? Perhaps a stop at either the stable (with a trail to the Sprague area) or a stop at the junction.*

The road to Sprague Lake would have to be substantially widened to allow a shuttle bus to safely drive to either the picnic area or the new Glacier Creek Livery. Widening the entire road could adversely wetland habitat along Boulder Brook. Visitors utilizing the picnic area often have coolers, picnic baskets, and charcoal that cannot be easily transported on a shuttle bus. The new Glacier Creek Livery was built with adequate parking for visitors, and relocating the livery away from the picnic area opened up additional parking for visitors at Sprague Lake. Because Sprague Lake is an important destination for park visitors, it has remained open to private automobiles despite the road closures that have occurred as a result of the Bear Lake Road reconstruction project.

In addition, we have determined that establishing a shuttle bus stop at Sprague Lake is not justified at this time because the existing facilities are not adequate to handle the increased visitation that would occur.

3. *The current bridge and narrow road serving Sprague Lake fit well with the low key atmosphere of the area. Without shuttle traffic, the bridge and road are probably adequate. Widening the bridge and road will introduce sediment into the Boulder Brook wetlands bordering the road, and bridge replacement will do likewise into Glacier Creek. Screening and filtering will be important, as will selection of the time of the project.*

The current bridge and a portion of the narrow road are not adequate to safely handle two-way traffic, even without shuttle buses. On page 27 of the Environmental Assessment it states there will be a loss of 400 square feet (0.009 acre) of wetland habitat. In Chapter 5, starting on page 43, we list the mitigating measures we will implement to minimize impacts to Boulder Brook and Glacier Creek. The mitigating measures include the use of the following Best Management Practices: filter barriers, sediment retention structures, revegetating disturbed areas, monitoring water quality, using temporary berms and curbs and erosion control blankets and mulch. On page 27 of the Environmental Assessment it states that consultation with the Army Corps of Engineers occurred as required in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The Army Corps of Engineers issued a permit to proceed with the work with the requirement that we mitigate the loss of 400 square feet of wetland by restoring wetlands at the former site of the Glacier Creek Livery. Restoration will occur at a 1:1.5 ratio, meaning that for every square foot of wetland disturbed by the proposed project, 1.5 square feet would be restored. Restoring the wetland at the former Glacier Creek Livery is now underway.

4. *I did not see mention of consultation with a hydrologist or fisheries biologist in the consultation section. Since both these areas will be exposed to potential impact, we would hope they will be included in the consideration and analysis of the alternatives, and their input reported in the final decision document.*

During the preparation and review of the EA we relied on park staff with education and training in biology and hydrology. Given the concerns expressed in this comment, we met at the site of the Sprague Lake Road bridge with NPS fisheries biologists on September 25, 2003, to reevaluate potential impacts and possible mitigation measures. The direction we received from the fisheries biologists was to separate construction activities from the stream. This can be accomplished using coffer dams, a culvert, or some other means to keep debris and soil from washing into the stream as the existing bridge is being dismantled and as the new bridge is being built. Additional mitigation measures have been added to Chapter 5 of the Final EA to protect water quality in Glacier Creek.